

of Piers Plowman's English Midlands I find
myself long-
ing, almost homesick, for that Greek
wilderness again—
the cloudless clearness of its distances; the
clean, sharp
sculpture of its limestone mountains, naked
but for their
scattered pine and holm-oak and pale,
spectral asphodel;
the blue of its sky at dawn and sunset, bitten
into by the
hilltops with their hard and splendid line. It
was twenty-
two centuries before Langland that here on
Helicon
another ploughman met with his very
different vision of
Poetry. He too was living dimly in the
twilight of a
heroic age, a world grown meaner and
smaller since the
day of seven-gated Thebes and windy Troy.
He is as far
from Homer's chivalry as Langland from
Froissart's.
Achilles, like the Black Prince, is a memory,
only more
remote; and in his place sit 'gift-devouring
kings', like
John of Gaunt. But it is not for them with
their ill-gotten
riches, but for the poor that Hesiod,¹¹ like
Langland,
sings. He is no court-minstrel. 'The poet of
Helots' King
Cleomenes was to call him, in after years.
Like an old
, shepherd piping among the fallen, moss-
grown columns
of a palace of forgotten kings, he uses the
splendours of
the Homeric hexameter to talk of ploughing
and of
bullocks. And yet, like Langland, he too
writes of loftier
things as well, of prayer as well as labour, of
Heaven and
Hell, of God and man, of good and evil, with
all the

homespun wisdom, the proverbs, the fables,
of the poor.

ⁿWith Hesiod, as with Langland, doubts have been
raised whether
he is the author of all the work attributed to him.
The *Theogony** a
verse-mythology, and the *Works and Days*, on
agriculture, may be by
different poets; though it seems to me absurd to
argue from the
mention of the name 'Hesiod' at the beginning of the
Theogony that
he did *not* write the latter. Poets can and, in periods
when authorship
is difficult to prove, often do name themselves. In any
case both these
didactic works belong to a Boeotian rural school;-and
we are mainly
concerned here with the *Works and Days*.